

Diamond Cut Diamond

By JANE BUNKER

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Still even Jacques Lerolls wasn't so wonderful as a young girl in Paris—she brought stoves covered with dripping seaweeds out of the bottom of a live bird into a locked room during a seance and had put it—after it had fluttered all about and everybody saw it—into a closed cage—“dematerialized it twice in one evening,” said Mrs. Delario. This girl had only just begun to develop materialization as one of her phases.

I confess it struck me as Mrs. Delario talked and told me how she'd been trying to make arrangements for one of these persons to come over with her that she was getting up new turns in her own shows much as a vaudeville manager hunts up new performers for his. She asked me to visit her in New York, not professionally but as a friend, and still, if I were interested and would undertake some investigations, she'd be glad to help me, and I couldn't refrain from saying, “That is, you'll put me next to some first-class spooks?”

I think this rather hurt her, for she answered a little tartly, “You may not be interested now—but you will be. The occult is coming into your life and you can't prevent it. You'll get manifestations that will—at least that may—drive you almost insane if you're not prepared for them and don't know how to handle the forces that are already at work about you.” And with that parting shot—that, of course, anybody might fire into you in self-defense or just to be a little nasty—she went away to Claire. And I'm going to confess right here that in spite of my skepticism I felt creepy.

I also felt clearer in my own mind on many little things I'd noticed about Claire: her coming to my stateroom that time; her constant hanging about me, even when she must have seen it was inconvenient for me to have her; and the way she seemed so much of the latter part of the voyage to be trying to keep away from Mrs. Delario, staying by herself in her stateroom. Had there been manifestations occurring in the stateroom? Or had Mrs. Delario been telling Claire things till she got the child so nervous the doctor was really serious over her?

Mrs. Delario was not at dinner that night and Claire left the table after the soup, and as I was busy packing I saw neither of them until morning, when all was bustle and excitement, for we'd passed the Statue of Liberty and were steaming up the bay and would be on dry land almost before we knew it. And then we were hanging over the rail and looking down at the friends of the passengers on the dock, and I heard Claire, in an agonized voice: “Mamma isn't meeting me!”

Claire began to cry, not boisterously but in a dreadfully pathetic, lost-child way, into a very beautiful French embroidered handkerchief, and all the customs inspectors gathered about her and she asked them each in turn if he'd seen mamma and described mamma, and he shook his head and told her he'd help her look for mamma in a minute as soon as he got the baggage inspected; and Mrs. Delario and I got our suitcases opened and made Claire open her bags and her trunk and we implored the inspectors to look at our meager belongings in a hurry and the inspectors were all too busy asking Claire what her mother looked like and what hotel she stayed at; and Claire would use her exquisite handkerchief on her more exquisite eyes and she supposed it was Hotel d'Angleterre—they always stopped at d'Angleterre when they traveled. Finally I managed to induce an inspector to take his eyes off Claire for a minute and devote them to the baggage of a middle-aged person—myself—and he cast a glance over my suitcase and Mrs. Delario's, which was open on a bench beside mine, and said, “That's all right. Where does the young lady come from, and isn't it awful her mother isn't here, and maybe she's met with an accident on the way and been killed.”

Claire heard him—and almost fainted into Mrs. Delario's arms. Now just a moment before he said these words I noticed that one of the two pairs of turquoise-studded slippers had fallen between the two suitcases. I picked it up and I was on the point of asking Mrs. Delario if it belonged to her when Claire collapsed, and three seconds later I saw my cousin, who should have met me, coming up on the trot.

He made the first sensible suggestion that had been offered—that as Mrs. Delario had Claire in charge she'd better take the child home with her and cable to the father for instructions.

The slipper was all this while in my hand, and without giving it another thought—indeed, hardly being conscious what I did—I stuffed it in



I Stuffed it in Among Some Clothes.

among some clothes in my own suitcase and shut the lid and away we went. Wasn't it, under the circumstances, a perfectly natural thing to do? Well, the moral is “don't”—don't every carry off an old slipper unless you're sure it's yours. That old slipper nearly cost me my sanity and my life!

Now, when I unpacked I found the slipper, but even then it didn't occur to me that it wasn't mine—I merely wondered how I'd lost the mate, and it was a couple of days before I got to the bottom of the other suitcase and found my own pair neatly done up in tissue paper. Of course I knew instantly that the old slipper was Mrs. Delario's, and remembered then how I'd carried it off; but I didn't have a box suitable for sending it through the mail to her, so I set it on a chest where I'd be sure to see it and not let it get mixed with mine, meaning to take it down to the house as soon as I could find time for it. And thus several more days went by, and I forgot the slipper and that Mrs. Jimmison was coming to clean. I somehow assumed that Mrs. Jimmison had sense enough to see it was an odd slipper and leave it on the chest where she found it, but you never can tell what anybody will do—perhaps she'd have done just the same if I'd told her not to; for she mixed those slippers up and set them in a row beside my bed along with oxford ties and bath slippers.

It was on the day that Mrs. Jimmison cleaned that Claire came tripping up to see me and tell me that her father had arrived. It was the first time I'd seen her since we'd parted at the cable office, and of course I had to spare her a few minutes and hear what she had to say. She was staying with her father at a hotel—mamma hadn't yet come, because grandpapa was dying every day and she didn't dare to leave him. And then she suddenly wished to know if all Americans lived the way Mrs. Delario did, and did American ladies work?

I had to ask her what she meant, and she explained that everything at Mrs. Delario's was “so unlike the way they lived abroad,” that Mrs. Delario never left her bedroom unlocked for a single minute; that all the upstairs rooms were locked; that she made her—Claire—keep her door locked, “because,” she said, “you never can tell,” that people, most of whom were strangers, were coming to the house all day from nine till five. Mrs. Delario called them “sitters” and gave them “readings” in an awfully queer room where the shutters weren't ever opened; and she—Claire—believed that Mrs. Delario took money for these readings, though she never would say what she read; and if she took money how could she be a lady? Though she was very nice and kind and papa wanted her to keep her—Claire—till her mother arrived, and Mrs. Delario wouldn't on account of her work, and what sort of work could it possibly be?

I saw by that that Mrs. Delario hadn't taken Claire much into her confidence—Claire said even her father couldn't guess what Mrs. Delario did, exactly, though he thought he knew a little, only he didn't know that ladies did it in America.

While I was considering what I'd better say the clock struck and I bounced out of my chair in a hurry—it was the hour of an appointment, and here I was five miles away, going

I told Claire I had to run, and she followed me to my bedroom while I got my coat, and it was she who exclaimed, “Why, there's Mrs. Delario's slipper! She's hunted everywhere for it. You picked it up at the customs house and put it in your suitcase.”

“I'm the thief,” I laughed, slipping on my coat.

Claire took a couple of steps toward the slippers and said, “I'll take it back to her.”

“No, my dear—just leave it. I don't know which is hers—I see Mrs. Jimmison has mixed them all up—and I haven't time to find out now.”

“Oh, I can soon tell,” and Claire was about to pounce on them, but I headed her off.

“That's a matter for me to attend to, Claire, and entirely between Mrs. Delario and myself.”

By this time I had on my veil and gloves, and hearing the elevator stopping at the floor, I shoed Claire and bolted for it.

Now I'd looked at the slippers as Claire spoke, and they were standing heel to the wall, between a pair of oxford ties and a pair of bath slippers that were foe to the wall, as were all the rest but these three slippers; and I noticed this particularly and remembered it later coming home in the cars when the incident recurred to me, and I wondered why—since Claire was no longer with Mrs. Delario—she had been so anxious to take the slipper back, and if she needed an excuse—possibly—to her father for going to the house to see her friend, and how if it hadn't been for Mrs. Jimmison I could have let her take the slipper and been glad to have her do it; and how Mrs. Jimmison must have pleased herself in placing the slippers just that way, backs to the wall, so they'd show off to best advantage as works of art and decorate the room at large with their beauty; and how it must have puzzled her to find three slippers all alike in my room—not two, not four, but three; and why three? And what would the good creature say if I told her I'd stolen the odd one?

These thoughts may seem too trivial to mention, but the point is that I thought them and they were so obviously suggested by the way Jimmison placed the slippers, heel to the wall. But here's the uncanny thing that happened: When I got home one hour after seeing them that way and turned on the light my eyes fell upon the slippers—THEY WERE ALL TOEING THE WALL.

It gave me such a shock that I sat flop down on the bed. So far as I knew not a human soul had entered during my absence of one hour and some minutes, nor was there any evidence that anything else in the place had been touched—the other shoes stood toe to the wall just as I'd seen them when I went out with Claire.

I suppose I'll be set down as a perfect fool, but I actually turned sick all over, and it required positive courage on my part to pick up the slippers and examine them. Which taught me nothing, of course, and—I may as well confess all my folly—I set them back heel to the wall and actually sat there and watched to see if they'd turn about of their own accord. But nothing happened, and there they stayed, heel to the wall, till morning.

That same evening, however, another thing happened that annoyed though it didn't alarm me. I was awakened about half past two by the sound of a key in the front door—someone was trying to get in. I bounced out of bed and looked to see that the chain bolt was on—that was all that worried me: for I had a neighbor on a floor below who came home frequently at that hour of the night in so elated a condition that he never stopped ascending stairs until he reached the top, and as my flat directly corresponded with his on the lower floor he tried to get in with his key, and sometimes threatened to smash the door in if “Minnie” didn't open it.

So hearing the familiar key now fumbling, I looked at the chain-bolt, and then merely “holloped” through the door my usual, “You're trying to get in the wrong flat—yours is downstairs.”

The key slid out of the lock and there wasn't another sound. I stood there shivering in my nightgown, waiting for the usual colloquy that would convince Mr. Man I wasn't his Minnie, but as he didn't favor me with so much as an oath of recognition, I went back to bed after a few moments and fell asleep. It never entered my head that the person at the other end of the latchkey wasn't the high-spirited Mr. Man that I knew and was prepared for, but another Mr. Man I didn't know anything about.

I went to sleep dreaming about slippers; I waked up to wonder about slippers. They were just as I'd left them—which gave me real disappointment. I was out nearly all day, and when I came home my first look was to see if the slippers had been making any more “manifestations.” ALL THREE SLIPPERS WERE GONE.

CHAPTER III.

Mrs. Delario's Diamonds.

To say I was astonished when I beheld that neat row of footgear with

three teeth knocked out simply doesn't express it. I was flabbergasted. It wasn't only the mysteriousness of that particular theft—if theft it were—and why all three slippers had been taken and not one slipper, or one pair; it was that nothing so far as I could observe had been touched in the flat but just the particular objects that the day before had turned and toed the wall. Now they had walked off and left me.

Well, the end of all my puzzling was that I had my choice between two explanations—(1) that some person, name, age and sex unknown, motive impossible to guess, had entered my flat with a duplicate key and stolen the slippers; or (2) that Mrs. Delario had worked a “physical manifestation” to get her slipper home and had taken all three at once to be on the safe side.

One explanation seemed about as possible as the other, for I didn't see how anyone could have a duplicate key—even the janitor does not have a pass key to the flats in this house—and I didn't see how magic could carry off three slippers. But whatever way I put it I had still the unpleasant task of explaining the loss to Mrs. Delario. I remembered she'd said when we were buying them that they were more than she could afford, but she just must have them and would go without something else, and I was particularly mystified because of it. If I could in any way have replaced the slipper I'd have done so and never said a word about it.

Meantime I remembered that I hadn't communicated with Mrs. Delario since my return—though I had the slipper all that time. Then came a letter asking me would I do her a great, a very great favor—would I come to her house that Sunday evening at eight o'clock? The letter arrived on Sunday morning, special delivery.

I went, but I never once mentioned the slippers—slippers were the last things in my mind as I rang the bell.

Mrs. Delario herself admitted me, apologizing that her maid was away



Mrs. Delario Herself Admitted Me.

for her Sunday evening out, and what between welcoming handshakes and Mrs. Delario's taking off my coat and insisting on my taking off my hat and “being comfy,” and my declining, and her leading me into the seance room Claire had told me about, and my astonishment at seeing it, slippers didn't occur to me and the chance to speak of them went by.

The seance room was as queer to my eye as it seemed to have been to Claire's. I think the impression uppermost in my mind was the soundlessness of the place. It seemed as remote from the bustling life of the great city in the midst of which it was as if it had been in the heart of a desert.

But Mrs. Delario left me but little time for observation; merely remarking that this was the seance room, she asked if I'd seen Claire and what I thought of her.

Well—I thought a great deal of her and many things about her, and while I was considering my answer Mrs. Delario propounded a question that fairly stunned me: “Do you think the girl could be a thief?”

“Oh, never—never in the world. What—Claire?” I cried hotly, and the picture of the high-bred girl came before me. I could as soon have thought my own sister a thief. Nevertheless I was soon at a loss to explain the episodes Mrs. Delario told me.

(To Be Continued)

Wouldn't Do.

“Now, getting down to brass tacks,” continued the sideshow manager, “why—”

“I daren't,” interrupted the Human Ostrich, who had been ill. “The doctor says I mustn't touch solid food for at least a week yet.”

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